DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 138 PS 025 152

AUTHOR Jambor, Tom
TITLE The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual: A Report on Its Development, Implementation, and Success.
PUB DATE 9 Oct 95
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Playground Safety (University Park, PA, October 9, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; Elementary Education; Evaluation Criteria; Foreign Countries; Parks; *Playgrounds; Preschool Education; Recreational Facilities; *Safety; School Safety
IDENTIFIERS *Child Safety; New Zealand; Playground Design; *Playground Equipment

ABSTRACT

"The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual" was designed for early childhood services, primary and intermediate schools, and park administrators. The manual was developed with the input of practitioners who attended seminars held throughout New Zealand and who reviewed all segments of the manual. Part 1 of the manual presents five steps for playground evaluation and ongoing inspection and maintenance: (1) introduction to the evaluation tool kit; (2) a checklist to describe the general playground environment; (3) safety evaluation for specific playground equipment; (4) actions for playground upgrading after safety evaluation is completed; and (5) weekly playground safety inspections. Part 2 deals with the roles of early childhood, school, and park personnel as integral components of the playground safety support system. The manual was sent to all Early Childhood Services, Primary and Intermediate Schools, and Public Park Administrations in early 1995 with recommendations to maximize implementation and to increase the visibility of the government sponsoring agency, the Accident Rehabilitation and Compensation Insurance Corporation (ACC), in working with the organizations. Recommendations included having the local ACC branch offices provide materials and assist with playground upgrading as needed and having the ACC update the manual as standards change. Informal feedback indicates that the Manual had a strong, positive reception and is currently being implemented across the three user areas throughout New Zealand. (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PS

THE NEW ZEALAND PLAYGROUND SAFETY MANUAL: A REPORT ON ITS DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, & SUCCESS

ED 405 138

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented By: Dr. Tom Jambor
School of Education
University of Alabama at Birmingham

October 9, 1995

For: Playground Safety: An International Conference
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Tom Jambor
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Introduction

Each year falls from playground equipment in New Zealand result in the hospitalization of over 1,000 children and every two years a death occurs. While we cannot eliminate childhood playground injury, we can make an effort to reduce the number and the seriousness of those injuries.

In most respects, dealing with playground safety is just "common sense". Unfortunately common sense is not always applied. In recognition of this many countries have introduced regulatory "standards" as a means of reducing the risk of injury on playgrounds through improved design, construction and maintenance. Being detailed, and at times technical, standards often reflect a level of complexity that makes the information they contain difficult to understand. Thus, many potential standards users are turned off and many playgrounds don't get evaluated, upgraded or maintained.

Much of the work to promote playground safety in New Zealand had been centered around implementation of the 1986 New Zealand Standard for Playgrounds and Playground Equipment (NZS 5828). While playgrounds throughout the country had been upgraded in recent years, the absence of clear and accessible practical advice on the design, construction and maintenance of playgrounds were real barriers to progress, particularly in the school environment. Although excellent in content, NZS 5828 was found to be too complex for the general population of users. New Zealand agencies agreed that if implementation was going to occur a more readable and easier implementation guide would be needed. To meet this objective New Zealand playground safety advocates David

PS 025152

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Chalmers (University of Otago Injury Prevention Research Unit) and Diana O'Neill (Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Leisure), in conjunction with their national health care agency (Accident Rehabilitation and Compensation Insurance Corporation), enlisted this author to develop a New Zealand playground manual based on one developed in the United States - a manual to make participation easy..... and to make common sense.

After examining the ways in which playground safety standards were conveyed to users in other countries Jambor, Chalmers & O'Neill converged to author *The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual*. This manual was not intended to replace NZS 5828, but rather to offer an alternative means to understanding the Standards content and, more importantly, encourage the adoption of thorough playground evaluation and maintenance procedures so children would have a safer place to play.

To set the stage for the development and distribution of *The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual* Jambor and O'Neill designed and facilitated a series of seminars entitled, "Playgrounds: Maintaining Challenge Within a Safe Environment". These seminars were held in the country's seven largest cities on the North and South Islands, were heavily attended by early childhood services, primary & intermediate school and park administration representatives, and provided the core of support for later manual implementation. The full-day sessions provided discussion on children's development and play needs, playground safety problem solving, and on-site playground evaluations using an early draft of the evaluation/audit tool that would eventually be refined for the manual. The sponsoring agencies also made sure that there was ongoing TV, radio and newspaper coverage of these issues, and by the end of the month long seven city seminar tour the greater New Zealand population was aware that a playground safety manual was in the works.

Manual Development

The manual was designed for three major populations of users: early childhood services, primary & intermediate schools, and park administrators. Representatives from each area, who had attended and provided input at the seminars, and who were in a position to influence playground safety, reviewed all segments of the manual during various stages of writing to ensure its readability and applicability. While this was a time

consuming task the authors felt that feedback from each area was imperative for manual success. Again, the purpose of this manual was to make it "user friendly" - readable and useable by all intended for. To this end, *The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual* was divided into two parts and made as attractive as possible.

The look or visual presentation of the manual was especially important to the authors. The premise was that the more initial appeal it had, the greater the probability of implementation. To this end content was put in an attractive eye-catching ring binder for easy removal of evaluation and inspection forms, cut-out templet test tools, and sheets that would be replaced with standard upgrades should standards change. To add interest a unisex-unicultural figure was cleverly injected throughout the text to accentuate sections, illustrate content, and to generally add interest and increase readability.

Part I walks the user through the steps of playground evaluation and ongoing inspection and maintenance. Six initial questions where asked: Why is it important to evaluate the condition of your playground? When should playgrounds be evaluated? Who should evaluate playgrounds? How are playgrounds evaluated? What should be looked at in a playground evaluation? Where should evaluation records be kept? Each of these questions were briefly answered to lay the foundation for an easy to implement *6 Step Playground Safety Evaluation and Weekly Inspection* format for early childhood, school and parks personnel.

- *Step 1* introduces the user to the "evaluation tool kit" that will be used. This includes an explanation of the evaluation tool items to be taken to the site, clearly stated tests for head entrapment, and instructions on how to make test probes and an angle form from cut-out template test tools that are provided to encourage immediate enactment at no cost.

- *Step 2* brings the user to the playground to begin the evaluation process. A checklist to describe the general environment of the playground is provided, and the question of "play value" is discussed.

- *Step 3* takes the user through a safety evaluation process for specific pieces of playground equipment, with easy to follow instructions on how to mark each piece being evaluated and how to identify the seriousness of problems found and prioritize the actions

to be taken. A discussion on the importance and acceptability of ground surfacing is provided.

**Step 4* provides a series of responsible actions for playground upgrading after the playground safety evaluation is completed. Since the a playground evaluation is only as good as its follow-up, the user is given three specific action points to follow through on: 1.) A copy of the evaluation forms are sent to a branch of the health care agency (ACC) along with a feedback form that indicates needs for assistance in improving the evaluated playground. This serves a dual purpose then - as documentation, for governing agencies, that all playgrounds are being evaluated, and as documentation, for site representatives, that upgrading help has been requested. 2.) A list of contacts within government and local agencies are provided to assist the user in meeting playground upgrade needs. 3.) To help site representatives become acquainted with and more knowledgeable about certain aspects of children's development, playgrounds and safety, a list of resources were provided. All references given the user were easily accessed - made available through government and local agencies and provided upon request.

**Step 5* zeros in on weekly playground safety inspections. Point by point instructions are given on how to carry out the inspections and what to do after the inspection is completed. Documentation is stressed. A "Weekly Playground Safety Inspection Record" sheet is provided for duplication for each week of the year, with a completed sample sheet to help the user get started. Keeping good records of playground safety action is imperative to ensure proper documentation and to establish accountability. To this end the manual provides 5 stick-on labels for easy, unambiguous designation of documentation folders. Copies of all evaluations, inspections, and responsible action taken are not only put in these folders but are also copied and sent to immediate supervisors and local governing agency branch offices. On-site record keeping and continued involvement of the supervisory or governing agency is the heart of on-going responsible action.

Part II deals with the roles of early childhood, school, and park personnel as integral components of the playground safety support system. To help create a safer playground the authors felt it was important to go beyond the initial evaluation and subsequent weekly inspections. The philosophy intent here revolved around the notion that

building a playground "Safety Support System" of adults and children who are associated with the playground on a daily basis would help bring about a more thorough and successful safety awareness and injury prevention program. Thus, each of the three user groups (early childhood, schools & parks) has their own color-coded section. Each is provided with a higherarcal diagram of their respective playground Safety Support System, and a description of the role of each system component. Each role, positioned to establish and implement a sound playground safety program, was given a list of suggestions to accomplish this task.

Implementation and Follow-up

The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual was sent to all Early Childhood Services, Primary & Intermediate Schools, and Public Park Administrations during February and March of 1995. Development and distribution of a playground safety manual is a commendable achievement, but also a meaningless effort if a strategy is not developed to ensure user implementation. Thus, the following 5 recommendations were made to the primary government sponsoring agency, the Accident Rehabilitation & Compensation Insurance Corporation (ACC), to maximize implementation of the Manual and to increase the ACC's visibility as an agency reaching out to support community efforts to increase playground safety and decrease the incidence of serious injury.

Recommendation 1: That local ACC branch offices collect and record the Manual Feedback Forms sent to them by recipients of the Manual as part of the acknowledgement process (a copy of this form is contained in the manual). Receipt of this form will indicate receipt of the Manual, implementation of the evaluation, and the need for assistance in upgrading the playground. Schools, Early Childhood Services and Park Administrators not returning the form will be reminded by the branch office to do so after a reasonable period. It is suggested that this information be collated by each branch and then sent to a central data collection point for analysis and monitoring. This should enhance the accountability of all parties.

Recommendation 2: That local ACC branch offices provide materials and assist with the upgrading of playgrounds as needed. ACC Injury Prevention Consultants should review the Manual Feedback Forms and respond to user needs. This may be in the form of

phone calls, letters, and/or personal visits. Information on such matters as playground design, designers and suppliers would be provided. The more personal and available the Consultants are to the user the greater the opportunity for playgrounds to be upgraded and for the ACC to achieve increased visibility. Along with this personal attention will come the knowledge that playground problems will be taken care of as soon as possible and that children will be less likely to be injured. It is suggested again that this information be systematically collected and stored for analysis. Knowing that the playground safety process is being monitored through data collection should keep those involved "on their toes" and aware of the process and expected accountability.

Recommendation 3: That the ACC update the Manual as Standards change. The format of the Manual will allow for modifications to be made as needed. ACC support in providing updates to Manual users will keep site evaluations current and increase ACC interaction with the community.

Recommendation 4: That the ACC utilize the data for research and accountability purposes as mentioned in Recommendations 1 and 2. It is suggested that the Injury Prevention Research Unit at the University of Otago be associated with the ACC to carry out this recommendation. Its vast experience and interest in playground safety and injury control would make the Injury Prevention Research Unit a most suitable host for information accumulated by local ACC branch offices across the country. The analysis of this information should strengthen awareness of the issue of playground safety and add value to the time, effort, and money invested in *The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual* to date.

Recommendation 5: That the ACC consider the promotion of Playground Safety as a long term commitment. To maintain playground safety awareness and associated visibility of the ACC it would be advantageous to continue promoting this topic beyond distribution of *The New Zealand Playground Safety Manual* and the follow-up process proposed above. A National playground safety campaign could be instituted on radio, TV and in the newspapers. A playground safety / evaluation / maintenance video could be produced as an information and instructional tool. Clever animation, slogans, real life accounts from children, cartoon strips featuring the Manual figure, and bumper stickers / posters / badges,

could be adapted for an ongoing family oriented media promotion sponsored by a concerned, helpful ACC.

Formal follow-up data was not available at the time of this writing. Informal feedback indicates that the Manual was given a strong, positive reception and is now being implemented across the three user areas throughout New Zealand. There is no indication at this time of a follow-through for Recommendation 5.